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Political agenda on Twitter during the 2016 Spanish elections: issues, strategies, and users' responses

Abstract

In recent years, political communication has been marked by an increased use of social media. Platforms such as Twitter have become an essential tool for political actors, especially during electoral campaigns. The aim of this study is to analyse the use of Twitter by Spanish political actors to build their agenda during electoral campaigns. The implementation strategy and users' responses were also analysed. A quantitative content analysis was conducted, which was complemented by a metric evaluation. The sample was taken from the general election of 26 June 2016. The profiles of the four political parties most popularly represented in Spain (Partido Popular, Partido Socialista, Podemos, and Ciudadanos) and their leaders (Mariano Rajoy, Pedro Sánchez, Pablo Iglesias, and Albert Rivera respectively), were analysed. A total of 9,049 tweets were studied and the results allowed us to detect various parameters of the management of political agendas on Twitter during the electoral campaign. Among them, it is worth highlighting: the existence of different forms of agenda-setting interactions built by the parties and articulated by the leaders, the low degree of thematic fragmentation, the prevalence of a game frame, the identification of three conditioning factors, and the detection of dissonance between the agenda built by politicians and the interests of the users of this platform.

Keywords
Political communication, Twitter, agenda-setting interaction, electoral campaigns.

1. Introduction

The emergence and consolidation of social media during the last decade has marked the future of political communication (Shirky, 2011). In particular, because of its ability to maintain closer and more direct contact with citizens, Twitter has become one of the most commonly used tools during electoral periods (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011) for customizing communicative action (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007) and for setting the political agenda (Christensen, 2013; López–Meri, 2016).

Since Barack Obama introduced social media to his campaign, succeeding in setting his own agenda and mobilising young voters

(Gainous & Wagner, 2014; Kapko, 2016), political actors have joined platforms, such as Twitter, to share their opinions and interact with their voters without the filter of conventional media (Wang *et al.*, 2016).

The main objective of this study is to analyse the use of Twitter by the main Spanish political parties and their leaders during the general elections held in June 2016, with the aim of understanding if there are similarities or differences in the agendas they built during the electoral campaign. We analysed their strategic focus on programmatic propositions or on seeking to capture votes and, finally, we analysed which topics, in terms of retweets and favourites, received a better response from users.

Previous research on this subject focused on the functions granted to Twitter by political actors in general campaign strategies (Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010; López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017). These refer to content viralisation (Campos-Domínguez & Calvo, 2017), interaction and dialogue of these actors through the social media (Alonso-Muñoz, Miquel-Segarra & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo & Lloves, 2016), and the type of agenda they built within it (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; López-García, 2016). However, research combining these last two aspects is scarce and studies describing the general elections held on 26 June 2016, in Spain, are virtually non-existent. Therefore, this research provides a new vision that contributes to, expands upon, and complements the previous knowledge on the topic.

The general election campaign of 26 June 2016 was marked by an atypical context. Six months earlier, on 20 December 2015, another general election had been held in which two new political forces, Podemos and Ciudadanos, entered the bipartisan political arena of the Partido Socialista (PSOE) and the Partido Popular (PP) that had prevailed in Spain during the past 40 years. On March 2016, the socialist candidate, Pedro Sánchez, attempted to be nominated as president, without success. With the absence of an agreement, on 3 May 2016, the Spanish Parliament was dissolved, resulting in the shortest legislature in the recent history of Spain. This then led to a new election leaving citizens infuriated at the lack of agreement between the different political forces forming the parliament. The barometer of CIS No 3138 of May 2016 demonstrated that 82.3% of respondents considered the political situation as bad (37.7%) or very bad (44.6%) and 90.6% considered the situation to be the same (41.7%) or worse (48.9%) when compared to one year ago.

2. Twitter and agenda-setting

In 1972, McCombs and Shaw raised an agenda-setting theory, in which they defended the high capacity of the media to direct public attention towards topics considered as the most relevant. Previously, Walter Lippman (2003, ed. original 1922) defended the idea that the media were the main source of the creation of images from the outside world in a citizens' imagination, as citizens were not capable of knowing everything that happens around them. In this sense, this agenda-setting directly affects the public knowledge structure and, therefore, the process of the formation of public opinion.

Currently, social media has joined the dynamics of this agenda-setting interaction, but it favours political actors producing and disseminating their own messages to citizens autonomously, initiating a process of auto-mediation (Cammaerts, 2012) that responds to the model of mass auto-communication proposed by Castells (2009). Thus, they can share their own topics and settings (Gainous & Wagner, 2014), influencing the debate and public opinion (Sampedro & Resina, 2010; Soengas, 2013; Fenoll & Cano-Orón, 2017).

In this sense, the study by Enli (2017) demonstrated that social media has a big impact on agenda-setting and this is particularly successful for actors newly incorporated into the political world. In Spain, Podemos is a good example of how an agenda was set by a political party, through a strategic and planned use of social media. By activating a two-way street

mediatization dynamics, this party managed to incorporate its proposals into conventional media (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra & Tormey, 2016).

Previous investigations highlighted topics that gained a greater role during election campaigns. These were related to the media and policy agendas pre-set by the party (López-Meri, 2016; Zugasti & Pérez, 2016) with the objective of uniting their followers, especially their voters and supporters. This leads most parties to focus more on promoting the content of their rallies and the events they attend and to capture the attention of the media, rather than raising concrete programmatic proposals. López-García (2016) argues that this is what happened with the leaders of new policy parties in Spain, embodied by Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) and Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos), who focused more on form than on the substance. That is, they were more concerned about the tone than the content, something that is typical of pop politics (Mazzoleni & Sfardini, 2009). On the other hand, leaders of traditional parties, Mariano Rajoy (PP) and Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), were concerned about presenting policy proposals, more or less concrete, to their followers. In this context, some authors consider that the reduction in the use of digital media as an auto-referring mechanism is required. Twitter must stop being merely an advertising board of electoral events and to include, in contrast, a greater number of messages that deal with matters of interest to citizens (Zugasti & Sabés, 2015; Zugasti & Pérez, 2016).

The practice of the new policy in Spain differs from what it is has been observed in other countries. Analysing the tweets published by candidates from third parties in the 2012 USA presidential elections, Christensen (2013) highlights how they successfully used Twitter by breaking the established *status quo* and offering information not present in the mass media. In this sense, it could be said, that they proposed an alternative agenda to the one marked by the two major parties, exposing topics of greater interest to citizens.

Non-realising programmatic proposals are, for some researchers, a symptom of the misuse of digital media (Zugasti & Pérez, 2016). Political actors make an intense use of cyber-rhetoric or digital language (Stromer-Galley, 2014; López-Meri, 2016) to mobilise the vote of their electorate, and so they ignore communication of concrete policy proposals for alternative plans and focus instead, on framing their online messages. In terms of a political strategy, as it happens in horse racing, it is important to reach the finish line first and get the largest number of votes and possible seats (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007; Strömbäck & Aalberg, 2008). Some studies show that media coverage based on the so-called game frame, focused on competing to win the elections and come to power, are closely related to an increased disaffection and cynicism towards politics in general and the political class in particular (Patterson, 1993; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Berganza, 2008). This aspect could be connected with the fact that messages of greater interaction with the public are those centred on criticism (Lee & Xu, 2017), humour (Marcos-García, Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2017), or linked to political infotainment (Holtz-Bacha, 2003; Casero-Ripollés, Ortells-Badenes & Rosique-Cedillo, 2014).

3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to analyse the use of Twitter by Spanish political parties and their leaders during the electoral campaign period, from the point of view of building the agenda. To address this general objective, three research questions were posed:

RQ1. What is the thematic agenda that the chosen profiles raised on Twitter?

RQ2. What is more important to the Twitter profiles of Spanish political actors: the sharing of programmatic proposals (issue frame) or the game and strategy to obtain votes (game frame)?

RQ3. Whicht issues received a better response from the public in terms of interaction?

The methodology used was based on a quantitative content analysis, a technique that allows an objective and systemic understanding of the content of analysed messages (Piñuel, 2002; Igartua, 2006). The sample of this research focused on the electoral campaign of the general elections held in Spain on 26 June 2016. In particular, the 15 official days of the electoral campaign, the reflection day, the voting day, and the day after voting were analysed. During this period, all tweets published by Partido Popular (PP), Partido Socialista (PSOE), Podemos, and Ciudadanos as well as by Mariano Rajoy, Pedro Sánchez, Pablo Iglesias, and Albert Rivera were studied.

The selection of these four political groups and their leaders was based on two main criteria. First of all, they were the four most popular political choices of the 2016 elections, representing 89.95 % of the suffrage. Secondly, they were political groups with clearly differentiated political trajectories. While PP and PSOE are two of the parties with the longest history in the Spanish political system, Podemos and Ciudadanos are new, emerging political groups. This fact allowed a comparison of the strategies of the two parties representative of traditional Spanish politics with the two linked to new policies.

Table 1. Categories used to analyse tweet issues

		Issues	Description
Issue Frame		**Economy**	Tweets including topics such as employment, unemployment, salary, deficit, public spending, debt, economic crisis, taxes, entrepreneurship, contracts, freelancers, etc.
		Social Policy	Tweets including topics such as pensions, health, education, the welfare state, social justice, equality/inequality (including domestic violence), housing, immigration, natality, etc.
		Culture and Sport	Tweets including topics related to cultural industries (cinema, literature, art, conventional media, social media, etc.) and sports.
		Science, Technology, and Environment	Tweets including topics related to R&D, network infrastructure (optical fibre, ADSL, and Wi-Fi), pollution, fauna and flora protection, climate change, etc.
		Infrastructures	Tweets including topics related to transport services (railway, airports) and infrastructure such as roads network.
		Corruption	Tweets including topics on political corruption.
		Democratic regeneration	Tweets including topics on democratic issues that need to be renewed/removed, such as changes in the electoral law, ending the establishment, and other privileges of the political class, etc.
		Territorial model of the State	Tweets related to the territorial organisation of the Spanish State. These include tweets about the independence of Catalonia and nationalism.
		Terrorism	Tweets related to terrorism in all its forms.
		Foreign affairs	Tweets referring to the European Union or other parts of the world.
	Governing Frame	**Strategy and government pacts**	Tweets including topics about the intention to build a certain type of government or possible (or impossible) future pacts.
	Horse Race Frame	**Voting and electoral results**	Tweets about surveys, soundings, information, analysis, and assessment of the election results. Tweets relating to voting action were also included.

Game Frame	Political as Individual Frame	Personal topics	Tweets referring to questions about the personal lives of political actors.
	Political Strategy Frame	Organisation and campaign functioning	Tweets referring to campaign operations and event organisation, such as rallies, meetings, political events, etc.
		Political harangues	Tweets in which the importance of the party-union is highlighted and encourages supporters to join the party and win. Similar to campaign slogans.
	News Management Frame	Relation with the media	Tweets in which information about a politician's appearance on social media is shared.
		Non-Topic	Tweets that do not have a defined issue or that include expressions of courtesy (acknowledgements, etc.).
		Others	Tweets that cannot be classified in the previous categories.

Source: Prepared by the authors

Table 1 shows the protocol of analysis applied to this study. We defined 18 categories collecting all issues raised by political actors during the campaign. In addition, in response to RQ2, these issues have been grouped according to their nature, with two main variables: issue frame and game frame based on the proposal by Aalberg, Strömbäck, and Vreese (2011). The first includes categories of public policy proposals and the second focuses on the electorate persuasion and voter recruitment strategy.

The sample data has been extracted using the Twitonomy web tool, which allows users to download tweets, retweets, and replies from the selected profiles. To answer the research questions 1 and 2, only individual tweets and replies were considered while retweets were discarded since they do not represent messages written by the political actors and serve only to redistribute information posted by other users (Larsson, 2015). In contrast, to answer the third research question, the number of retweets and favourites made by Twitter users to their tweets and replies published by the profiles studied in this research have also been considered. A total of 9,049 tweets were analysed, and the statistical analysis of the results was carried out with SPSS (v.23.) Intercoder reliability was calculated using Scott's Pi formula, which reached level 0.97.

4. Results

4.1. Metric Analysis

The results extracted from the metric analysis of analysed profiles allowed for an extraction of the overall trends of the use of Twitter by the main Spanish political parties and their leaders. Table 2 summarises the most important information.

All parties, except Podemos, observed a general increase of followers during the campaign, although Ciudadanos achieved a greater variation (1.49%). However, the party led by Albert Rivera had far fewer followers on Twitter, recording 340,000 followers by the end of the campaign. This number was much lower than the number of followers obtained by Podemos, which with 1.1 million followers was by far the party with the most followers on this social media. This data is a good indication of the follower profiles of each party: Podemos followers are more active on social media while the followers of PP, PSOE, and Ciudadanos do not use this type of media as much.

Table 2. Descriptive data of the activity on Twitter of the main Spanish political parties and their leaders

		PP	M. Rajoy	PSOE	P. Sán-chez	Podemos	P. Iglesias	C's	A. Rivera
Followers when the Campaign started		546,000	1.21M	436,000	342,000	1.1M	1.77M	335,000	605,000
Final followers of the Campaign		553,000	1.21M	442,000	354,000	1.1M	1.77M	340,000	620,000
Variation in Followers		+7,000 (1.48%)	0	+6,000 (1.38%)	+12,000 (3.51%)	0	0	+5,000 (1.49%)	+15,000 (2.58%)
Own Tweets	N	974	322	3,100	270	2,504	78	1,579	93
	%	49.19%	41.07%	68.52%	39.53%	59.69%	58.21%	74.87%	12.4%
Retweets	N	985	461	1,411	362	1,682	33	529	647
	%	49.75%	58.80%	31.19%	53%	40.10%	24.63%	25.08%	86.27%
Replies	N	21	1	13	51	9	23	1	10
	%	1.06%	0.13%	0.29%	7.43%	0.21%	1.33%	0.05%	1.33%
Average Tweets per day		110	43.56	251.33	37.94	233.06	7.44	117.17	41.67
Total		1,980	784	4,524	683	4,195	134	2,109	750

Source: Prepared by the authors

In general terms, the number of published messages also varies significantly between the different parties. PSOE (4,524) and Podemos (4,135) published the largest number of Tweets, with an average of 251 and 233 tweets per day, respectively. These numbers were quite different from the rest of the parties, which published approximately half of these messages: 110 per day in the case of PP and 117 per day in the case of Ciudadanos.

If we focus on the analysis of the types of messages that they spread, significant differences were also observed between the parties. The retweet function of Twitter was a resource frequently used by three of the parties particularly more than the dissemination of personal messages; Ciudadanos (74.87%), PSOE (68.52%), and Podemos (59.69%). According to the logic of auto-mediation (Cammaerts, 2012), this use of Twitter responds to an independent production and diffusion of content. The exception was PP, which published original messages (49.19%) and retweeted (49.75%) with approximately the same frequency and so this party produced and disseminated their own content in the same proportion that they redistributed the information published by other users.

The frequency of Twitter messaging by leaders was much lower than that of their parties (Table 2). In particular, while PSOE and Podemos were the parties that used this social media the most, Pedro Sánchez (683) and Pablo Iglesias (134) used it the least. This data reinforced the idea of the existence of a complementarity strategy on Twitter between the profiles of the parties and their candidates (Casero-Ripollés, Sintes-Olivella & Franch, 2017). Nevertheless, with the exception of Pedro Sánchez, the personal profiles of the candidates accumulated a greater number of followers. This data is especially relevant in the case of Iglesias who attained 1.77 million followers and Rajoy who attained 1.21 million followers.

Reviewing the type of messages that they disseminated, it is worth noting that Rajoy, Sánchez, and Rivera used their personal Twitter accounts to share messages posted by other profiles, especially from their own party. This was demonstrated by the high percentage of retweets that they made: 58.80%, 53%, and 86.27% respectively. Conversely, Pablo Iglesias

prioritised the diffusion of his own content (58.21%), providing added value and differentiating his communication on Twitter.

What both parties and their candidates shared, was the low percentage of replies that they accumulated in their profiles. Generally, the number of replies was between 0.05% and 1.33% in all profiles, except in the case of Pedro Sánchez, who responded to a greater number of users during the campaign (7.47%). This data was a clear indication of the lack of importance that the analysed political actors assigned to dialogue and interaction with their users, confirming the findings of previous studies (Alonso-Muñoz, Miquel–Segarra & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2016).

4.2. What do political actors talk about on Twitter?

The analysis of the thematic agenda built by political parties and their leaders provided diverse empirical evidence. The main content of the messages during the campaign of the four analysed parties was the strategy and policy of the Government, that is, the intention of building a certain type of government and the possible (or impossible) pacts that could be implemented after the Elections (Table 3). These values were especially high in the case of Ciudadanos (30.1%) and PP (29.7%), and lower in PSOE (23.6%) and Podemos (17.2%). After Pedro Sánchez failed to become nominated in the previous legislature, the shortest in Spanish history, all parties wanted to make their position very clear on whom they would support after the elections. Accordingly, PP presented itself in its messages as a 'serious and sensible' political actor, capable of maintaining the 'right direction' for Spain, especially 'economically'. Meanwhile, the rest of the parties defined themselves as 'the change', or the 'alternative to the PP'. Moreover, Podemos and PSOE openly defended the idea that they would never support a PP Government.

In its messages, PP presented itself to voters as 'the moderate option', opposed to the 'radicalism' of Podemos. Therefore, PP reiterated in numerous tweets the fact that they were the only party that represented the 'useful vote', arguing that they were willing to negotiate with 'constitutionalist parties' if necessary. However, they insisted on defending the idea that 'after the elections, the most voted list will be allowed to govern'. In turn, Partido Socialista, in messages disseminated on Twitter, presented itself to voters as 'the solution to the problems of Spain', and as 'the responsible option ensuring change and a Government'. In numerous messages, they highlighted the fact that Rajoy was not going to present himself as a candidate in the investiture session. There were also frequent tweets where the PSOE criticised Podemos for not having supported Pedro Sánchez in the investiture session of the elections held on 20 December 2015.

In their messages, Podemos presented themselves as 'the political change in Spain' and encouraged PSOE to 'be part of it [the change]'. However, their messages about the political strategy of Ciudadanos referred to the wiliness of agreeing to the 'constitutional forces' of the country and, additionally, to their battle against the 'populism of Podemos'.

Table 3. Topics of the tweets published by political formations

	PP	M. Rajoy	PSOE	P. Sánchez	Podemos	P. Iglesias	C's	A. Rivera
Economic	19.7%	15.4%	8.4%	2.8%	11.4%	3%	12.6%	1.9%
Social Politics	6.8%	3.8%	23.6%	11.5%	11.4%	7.9%	6.5%	2.9%
Culture and Sport	0.7%	3.1%	1.7%	4.4%	1%	1%	1.9%	2.9%
Science, Technology, and Environment	0.3%	0.6%	0.7%	0.3%	1.2%	1%	0.4%	1%
Infrastructure	0.2%	0%	0%	0%	0.1%	1%	0%	0%

Corruption	2%	0.9%	5.2%	5%	6.5%	1%	5.9%	7.8%
Democratic Regeneration	3.4%	0%	10.1%	5.9%	11.5%	3%	12.3%	2.9%
Territorial Model of the State	3.3%	6%	1.6%	0.6%	1.5%	0%	1.3%	1%
Terrorism	0.2%	0.9%	0.6%	1.9%	0.6%	1%	0.3%	2.9%
Foreign affairs	6%	6%	4.8%	6.2%	3%	5.9%	3.4%	10.7%
Strategy and policies of the Government	29.7%	23.6%	23.7%	25.2%	17.2%	2.1%	30.1%	10.6%
Voting and election results	6.6%	7.5%	5%	7.2%	6.6%	11.1%	3%	4.9%
Personal Topics	0.6%	0.9%	0%	1.9%	0%	13.1%	0.4%	0%
Organisation and Campaign performance	7.6%	23.7%	2%	12.5%	11.5%	18.8%	8.8%	29.1%
Political Harangues	6.3%	2.5%	9.8%	5.9%	12.3%	9.1%	7.4%	6.8%
Relationship with MMCC	5.7%	3.5%	2.1%	8.1%	3.1%	13.1%	5%	13.6%
Non-topic	0.2%	1.6%	0%	0.6%	0.1%	2%	0.1%	1%
Others	0.7%	0%	0.7%	0%	1%	6.9%	0.6%	0%

Source: Elaborated by the authors

PP, PSOE, and Ciudadanos built a thematic and very compact agenda on Twitter and were especially focused on the dissemination of messages on two or three topics throughout the campaign. However, the Podemos agenda was very fragmented (Table 3). The party led by Pablo Iglesias had values over 10% in 6 of the 18 categories. Therefore, this data revealed that while Podemos choose to diversify its message, the other parties are committed and concentrated on a few topics, especially on those defining them and distinguishing them ideologically from the rest of the parties.

Figure 1. Ciudadanos and Partido Popular tweets concerning the economy[1]

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[1] Translation tweet 1: We have already recovered the half of the jobs lost with the crisis. @pablocasado_ #L6Ntictac26J
Translation tweet 2: @Albert_Rivera: "C's proposes that all independent employs receiving below MI should not pay any fee" #Debate13J

Differences between parties were also observed according to their ideological axis. Thus, right-wing parties such as PP (19.7%) and Ciudadanos (12.6%), were focused on messages about economic topics (Table 3). In the first case, tweets about the economic recovery of Spain attributed to the party and their conduct during the four years of the PP Government were mainly included, as well as some proposals for the new legislature (Figure 1). In contrast, Ciudadanos opted for criticising the economic measures implemented by the Government and proposed improvements to the pay of self-employed workers and the promotion of entrepreneurship, two key parts of their party policies (Figure 1).

In contrast, the left-wing parties, Podemos (11.4%) and PSOE (23.6%), opted for a focus on social policies (Table 3). This was especially true in the case of the socialists, who dedicated most of their messages to criticising the lack of social measures of the Rajoy Government and made proposals, for example, to approve a new law against gender violence (Figure 2). Similarly, Podemos accused the PP Government of removing Spain's Welfare State. Moreover, among its proposals, it highlighted the creation of a minimum wage for people who are at-risk-of-poverty (Figure 2).

Figure 2. PSOE and Podemos tweets on social policies[2]

Another facet to highlight was the fact that the idea of democratic regeneration was not attributed solely to new political parties, such as Podemos (11.5%) and Ciudadanos (12.3%), but traditional parties such as PSOE (10.1%) also considered it legitimate to introduce this change (Table 3). In this context, the parties led by Iglesias and Rivera defended reforms such as the elimination of the appraisal of parliamentarians and senators, the limitation of mandates, or the reform of the electoral law, and focused on building new proposals for the improvement of the democracy of Spain. However, the PSOE defined itself in its messages as representing the opposite of the PP, but it did not focus on concrete proposals for improvement but instead focused on disseminating flashy and recurring messages as slogans.

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[2] Translation tweet 1: We propose raising the minimum wage of up to € 950 to give to our people a decent life. #Debate13J
Translation tweet 2: With PSOE, there will be a state pact against gender violence that eliminates cuts and protects women and children @CarmenMonton #UnSíPorLaIgualdad

In terms of political leaders, Mariano Rajoy and Pedro Sánchez followed a Twitter publication strategy based on unity and coherence with respect to their political parties (Table 3). In this sense, both leaders of PP and PSOE focused their messages on discussing aspects related to the party strategies and government policies (23.6% and 25.2% respectively). In addition, as their parties did, Rajoy prioritised tweets related to economic issues (15.4 %), and Sánchez focused on subjects concerning social policy (11.5%). However, both candidates sought to dissociate themselves from their parties when dedicating a large number of messages to topics concerning the campaign functioning and organisation: 23.7% in the case of Rajoy and 12.5 % for Pedro Sánchez. With this type of message, they usually shared with followers the agenda and coming events, and they acknowledged the support of all those participating in the campaign.

Conversely, the use of Twitter by Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera is marked by a clear complementarity to the strategy followed by their political parties (Table 3). Despite the fact that in the agenda built by Podemos, there is a high degree of fragmentation, the profile of Iglesias created a greater concentration, and 4 topics accounted for 55.4% of their messages. Thus, while Podemos focused on topics related to campaign organisation, democratic regeneration, the economy, and social policy, Iglesias concentrated on personal topics (13.1 %) and the relation with conventional media (13.1%); mechanisms that allowed him to build his image as a leader (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Pablo Iglesias tweets with a personal theme and the relationship with the MMCC[3]

Albert Rivera presented a similar pattern. While Ciudadanos dedicated its efforts to sharing messages about the economy, democratic regeneration, and the political strategy and policies of the Government, Rivera prioritised topics relating to campaign organisation (29.1%), the relationship with the media (13.6%), and foreign affairs (10.7%) (Table 3). The leader of Ciudadanos was clearly concerned about the future of the United Kingdom after Brexit and on numerous occasions, referred to the reconstruction of a strong and united European Union. Rivera also chose to advertise his presence at events organised by the party and his appearances in interviews and debates, promoting his humanity and face to the public (Figure 4).

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[3] Translation tweet 1: There are hugs that, without speaking, say it all
Translation tweet 2: I leave here the interview that made me @pardodevera to @publico_es

Figure 4. Albert Rivera's tweets[4]

Both parties and leaders that represented new policies shared themes during the campaign in order to diversify their message. In this way, emerging parties directed their communication towards the promotion of ideological aspects of their campaign and the discussion of concrete policy proposals. On the other hand, their leaders sought to build their political image through personalisation and humanisation.

Finally, it should be noted that the categories 'Science, Technology, and Environment', 'Infrastructure', and 'Terrorism' presented very low values in every profile, ranging between 0 and 2.9% (Table 3).

4.3. The frame of the messages: program vs. strategy

The data shows that with the exception of PSOE, who opted to make concrete policy proposals, the rest of the political parties and their leaders focused their communication strategies on those topics that could help them win the electoral battle (Table 4). In this sense, Spanish political actors are more focused on the aspects of the battle, its contenders, and winning the election rather than on exposing and discussing problems, causes, consequences, solutions, and measures that can be adopted if they gain access to the Government.

The issue frame or thematic approach, is thus, overcome, by the game frame, or game focus. This means that an important part of the analysis of these Twitter profiles presented a vision of politics understood as a strategic game in which political actors compete with each other to win elections (Patterson, 1993). With the messages included in the game frame, the criticisms towards other parties and political leaders prevailed alongside the strategic battle language. In this sense, it was common that words like conflict, defence, attack, or destruction appeared in the tweets. On the other hand, with the issue frame, the focus was much more informative and sought to provide information on electoral policies, so that voters could decide which option to choose from when the elections were held.

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[4] Translation tweet 1: I have called Rajoy to agree on a common position at the next European Council. Europe needs reforms, union, and stability. #Brexit
Translation tweet 2: Thanks to everyone for the love and energy that you have given to us in #Albacete. Let's start Spain. #26J

Table 4. Tweet distribution according to Issue Frame and Game Frame

		PP	M. Rajoy	PSOE	P. Sánchez	Podemos	P. Iglesias	C's	A. Rivera
ISSUE FRAME		42.6%	36.7%	56.7%	38.6%	48.2%	23.8%	44.6%	34%
GAME FRAME	**Governing Frame**	29.7%	23.6%	23.7%	25.2%	17.2%	2.1%	30.1%	10.6%
	Horse Race Frame	6.6%	7.5%	5%	7.2%	6.6%	11.1%	3%	4.9%
	Political as Individual Frame	0.6%	0.9%	0%	1.9%	0%	13.1%	0.4%	0%
	Political Strategy Frame	13.9%	26.2%	15.7%	18.4%	23.8%	27.9%	16.2%	35.9%
	News Management Frame	5.7%	3.5%	2.1%	8.1%	3.1%	13.1%	5%	13.6%
	TOTAL	56.5%	61.7%	42.6%	60.8%	50.7%	67.3%	54.7%	65.1%
Non-topic		0.2%	1.6%	0%	0.6%	0.1%	2%	0.1%	1%
Others		0.7%	0%	0.7%	0%	1%	6.9%	0.6%	0%
TOTAL		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Generally, the game frame was used more by leaders than parties and was especially present in the leaders' messages of new policies (Table 4). Pablo Iglesias (67.3%) and Albert Rivera (65.1%) expressed communication that encouraged content whose objective was obtaining votes, either by showing their presence in campaign events, addressing their electorate to obtain their support (Political Strategy Frame), or sharing their conventional media appearances (News Management Frame). Iglesias also sought to capture votes by illustrating his attributes and personal characteristics to differentiate himself from the rest of the candidates (Political as Individual Frame). In this sense, the rhetoric used in the messages was more important than the content.

When sharing messages based on the game approach, the leaders of the old political parties, Mariano Rajoy and Pedro Sánchez, focused specifically on the future of their campaigns (Political Strategy Frame) and strategy and government policy (Governing Framing). In this respect, most of their messages focused on explaining whom they would support to win the elections, a focus that is shared by all of the political parties, whom all showed very high values in this category (Table 4).

In the case of Sánchez, this type of messaging also served to criticise the other parties for not having supported him in the investiture session held on March 2, 2016, and, as a consequence, to have caused the need for new elections.

4.4. Which issues get a better response from users?

In order to respond to RQ3, the retweets and favourites obtained by tweets and replies published by the analysed profiles of political parties and leaders were assessed. Table 5 shows the average retweets (RT) and favourites (FAV) obtained by each tweet, for both leaders and political parties, according to the subject, and the average RT and FAV of the total number of released messages. In general terms, the average RT and FAV achieved by political leaders is higher than the average achieved by parties. This is because although candidates publish a lower number of messages than their parties, their notoriety and popularity make it easier for them to obtain a higher virality on the network.

An analysis of the interaction of the followers with the Twitter messages of the analysed political actors demonstrated that the public reaction to the messages differed significantly according to the subject (Table 5).

Table 5. Average RT and FAV according to issue

Topic	Leaders		Parties	
	Average RT/tweets	Average FAV/tweets	Average RT/tweets	Average FAV/tweets
Economy	244.65	209.48	**116.04**	**78.50**
Social Policy	274.38	257.70	85.87	58.84
Culture and Sports	405.65	**543.71**	90.65	**81.88**
Science, Technology, and Environment	242.20	336.00	95.26	70.00
Infrastructure	**641.00**	**778.00**	87.25	60.00
Corruption	**444.04**	314.79	**101.97**	74.97
Democratic Regeneration	**747.92**	**770.56**	93.46	**76.05**
Strategies and Government policies	301.60	260.89	95.29	71.50
Votes and Electoral Results	**697.25**	**934.83**	**109.93**	**106.02**
State Territorial Model	266.23	239.86	**102.33**	70.13
Terrorism	**566.62**	**623.08**	**132.38**	**96.69**
Personal Topics	**502.41**	**778.36**	**292.31**	**340.31**
Organisation and Campaign functioning	332.84	445.91	91.80	**90.98**
Relation with MMCC	301.95	425.44	72.42	65.69
Non-topic	**417.40**	**493.20**	90.00	**86.75**
Others	**2077.71**	**2095.57**	**108.22**	**91.28**
Foreign Affairs	**530.02**	**493.48**	86.09	60.48
Political Harangues	**651.84**	**809.16**	93.68	**80.73**
TOTAL	410.12	462.98	96.35	75.37

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The analysis of the impact of the agenda built by political leaders on Twitter indicated that there were ten main topics that above average, caught the attention of their followers (Table 5). However, tweets described as 'Others' received the most retweets and favourites. Although they have a low value on the political actors' agenda on this platform, this type of message had a high quantitative impact. It is worth highlighting, in particular, a Tweet written by Pablo Iglesias in which he jokes about his friendship with the leader of the Izquierda Unida, Alberto Garzón, and its communist ideology (Figure 5). This was the most retweeted message of the entire campaign (8.308 RT and 7.941 FAV).

Figure 5. Topics covered by the leaders that received the most interest from followers[5]

In the same vein, there are other tweets shared by Iglesias where he jokes with other members of his party or, make ironic comments about a TV series such as Game of Thrones (Figure 5) that obtained very high interaction rates from his followers. This data reinforces the evidence that Twitter users prioritised the most banal issues, humour, and spectacularity versus the hardest topics associated with public interest and government issues such as the economy (López-Meri, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017).

The other top five topics that generated large interaction from users included messages about democratic regeneration, electoral results, political speeches, and infrastructure (Table 5). Concerning the renewal of some political structures of the country, such as Senate suppression, the deputies' appraisal suppression or the change of the Electoral law, as well as the construction of the Mediterranean corridor, were topics that concerned the public, and this was reflected on Twitter.

With regard to political parties, there were also between seven and ten topics on Twitter that caught the attention of citizens (Table 5). However, personal issues obtained a higher RT and FAV level. Thus, political parties received more interaction from users when they shared personal traits of their candidates, presenting them as more human, and closer to citizens. The aim was to humanise leaders and illustrate that their life, with hobbies, friends, and family, was similar to that of ordinary citizens. Thus, for example, to develop an identification process with Albert Rivera's potential audience on Twitter, Ciudadanos illustrated in various tweets his love for football and his special predilection for the Spanish team (Figure 6).

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[5] Translation tweet 1: A friend of Pablo Casado has given this photo to him. He says that @agarzon and I are arriving at the Congress of Deputies.
Translation tweet 2: Thank goodness that women take the initiative in Game of Thrones otherwise...

Figure 6. Issues covered by parties that were of greatest interest to users[6]

However, as in the case of political parties, it is curious that tweets related to proposed economic measures had a notable impact on users (Figure 6). This could be due to the fact that the economy is undoubtedly one of the main concerns of citizens, as evidenced by various barometers published by the Centre of Sociological Opinions (CIS). In the CIS barometer No 3142, published before the start of the election campaign on 26 June 2016, 76.4% of respondents considered unemployment as the main problem in Spain, while 25.1% emphasised economic issues. This could be an explanatory factor as parties obtained a high level of interaction from Twitter users when they proposed improvements to sensitive economic issues such as unemployment, economic growth, or entrepreneurship.

5. Conclusions

The results obtained allow us to detect several original contributions in relation to the construction of the thematic agenda by political actors on Twitter. First, there is evidence that this platform, despite its potential for the self-production of content and self-mediation (Cammaerts, 2012; Castells, 2009), does not encourage a high degree of fragmentation of the political agenda. On the contrary, analysed parties and leaders, except Podemos, articulated a very compact and concentrated agenda, centred on two or three topics. Therefore, the 2.0 environment does not encourage a greater diversification and dispersion of political messages by offering these actors control over their communicative activity.

The second contribution related to the interrelationship between the topics included in the agenda of political parties and those of their leaders. The results illustrate differences in the management of this aspect of Twitter communication, which depended on the previous trajectory of the political actors. This determinant factor caused organisations and candidates with a greater history to establish a high level of coherence and similarity between the topics disseminated in party profiles and those distributed in the profile of the leader. This strengthens the message, its cohesion, and its potential impact. On the other hand, the study found that emerging political actors established more complementarity between the party and the leader, as in the profiles of both, prominence was not given to the same topics. Thus, they seek to publicise a greater number of proposals and expand the circulation of their messages, even at the expense of generating dispersion. Previous literature detected the presence of complementary strategies on Twitter (Casero-Ripollés,

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[6] Translation tweet 1: We keep on celebrating goals! Celebrating the wonderful game of the selection! #CsConLaRoja #VamosEspaña
Translation tweet 2: In these four years, we passed from recession to growth… @marianorajoy #Debate13J

Sintes-Olivella & Franch, 2017), but they did not demonstrate that the trajectory of political actors was determined by their use.

Third, the data obtained reveals the existence of a dissonance between the thematic agenda built by the political actors on Twitter and the interests of the users of this platform. What most attracts the attention of politicians in their tweets, and monopolises their agenda is not what generates the most sharing and support on this social media from citizens. The public interest focuses on banal and humorous messages, emphasising the status of policy. The large number of RT and FAV of this type of message demonstrates that the use of resources of humour or irony enhances the connection between political actors and users (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Only economic matters could be indicated as an exception to this tendency, due to the importance they presently attain within the social concerns of citizens. Omitting the latter, these issues assume low values in the thematic agenda of political actors who are more oriented towards the areas of public interest and government issues. Thus, on Twitter, a detected phenomenon is reproduced. Initially, before the generalisation of web analytics, in digital journalism disagreement had also been established between the topics considered most relevant by journalists and the most read and viewed by readers (Justel-Vázquez, Micó-Sanz & Sánchez-Marín, 2016; Tandoc, 2014).

The fourth contribution is the demonstration that the strategy of the political actors on Twitter while building their thematic agenda was based on the game frame. Within it, criticism towards adversaries and warlike language accentuating political confrontation are favoured. This means that the issue frame, including concrete programmatic proposals addressing issues of public interest, takes a secondary position. Political actors do not conceive this social media as an instrument from which it is possible to launch concrete proposals, but as a platform from which they can persuade the electorate to vote for them and contribute to their electoral victory. Different authors indicate that this can lead to an increased disaffection of citizens with respect to policy (Patterson, 1993; Berganza, 2008). Through this strategy, political actors focus more on the form than on the content, that is, they are more concerned with launching attractive messages that capture the attention of users than presenting concrete proposals (López-García, 2016) fostering the rhetoric typical of social media (López-Meri, 2016) and adopting the characteristics of pop politics (Mazzoleni & Sfardini, 2009). However, it should be noted that the game frame may have been used because the election analysed was not ordinary, but rather a repeated election after it had been impossible to form a government, for which it is assumed that the citizens already knew the political policies of the parties.

Finally, the fifth contribution of this research has to do with the identification of conditioning factors that determine how political actors construct thematic agendas on Twitter. These factors include the political context, the ideological axis, and the historical trajectory of political organisations. The first factor can be found in the predominance of tweets about post-electoral pacts, which is the category with the greatest presence. Due to a failure in the process of government formation in the previous legislature in Spain, this issue was the main topic and the preferential concern of political actors because of the perspective of new negotiations after the elections. For its part, the ideological axis also influences the composition of the political agenda. The progressive parties, such as Podemos and PSOE, are oriented towards issues of a social nature, while parties at the right of the political board, such as PP and Ciudadanos, pay more attention to the economy. Finally, as we have stated above, the historical journey of political actors is a key element influencing the interrelation between the thematic agenda of the party and the leader and also in the dominance of the game frame. With regard to this last aspect, the emerging political organisations strengthen the logic of a strategic nature in their agenda to maximise the votes in the electoral contest.

This set of contributions allows us to open new ways of understanding the dynamics of political agenda-setting on Twitter in the context of an electoral campaign both in terms of the exercise of self-communication by parties and leaders and the impact of the activity of citizens within this social media.

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